DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 109 550 CG 009 956

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TITLE The Relationship of Teacher's Cognitive Style to Minority Student Satisfaction.
PUB DATE [75]
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American College Personnel Association (50th, Atlanta, Georgia, March 1975); Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 PLUS POSTAGE. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Affective Behavior; *Cognitive Processes; *Communication (Thought Transfer); *Cultural Differences; Interaction Process Analysis; *Minority Groups; Research Projects; Secondary Education; Secondary School Students; *Teacher Behavior; Teacher Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS F NR Index; *Friedenberg Nordstrom Ressentiment Index

ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken in an attempt to determine if the traits of flexibility, openness, and sensitivity found in high school teachers would be associated with higher levels of satisfaction among students in general and among minority students in particular. Thirty-nine teachers and 953 students served as subjects in the study. Three measures were administered to teachers: (1) the Parsons-Kreuter Ressentiment Index; (2) the This I Believe test; and (3) the Cross Cultural Sensitivity test. These scales were related to a measure of student satisfaction with the teacher and school environment obtained via the Friedenberg-Nordstrom Ressentiment Index. Support was found for the hypothesis that the openness, flexibility, and sensitivity of a teacher's cognitive style and perceptual systems can have positive effects on the satisfaction and adjustment of students. Unusual or exceptional patterns of relating to others did not seem to be required for successful communication with minority students. However, without the sensitivity to understand another and to resist the inclination to make strong and negative attributions based on unusual behavior, the "concerned" teacher may be seen as paternalistic and unresponsive. (Author/PC)

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF TEACHER'S COGNITIVE STYLE TO MINORITY STUDENT SATISFACTION

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American schools are facing major challenges in an attempt to provide education for the diverse subcultures in the country. The need is to facilitate an organization of the diversity without homogenizing and destroying cultural identities. Possow (1968) has stated that the schools may be the singular point of contact for children of minority subcultures with the broader society. Since teachers stand as direct representatives of the educational system, the fate of successful assimilation of subcultures boils down to a series of teacher-student interactions in which effective communication is the core.

Teachers today are faced with the task of establishing effective environments wherein students from a wide variety of backgrounds and human experience can learn. As in any social interaction, communication is the determining factor between success and failure. The process of communication is complicated by the fact that, to a considerable extent, differences in race, nationality, and social class, represent true distinct differences in culture.

In the area of cross cultural communication, Gardner (1962) has argued that social distance and tension result primarily from an inability of individuals to communicate effectively with one another despite an outward mutual language fluency. Both Gardner and Hudson (1959) have highlighted the role of perception and meaning equivalence in cross cultural communication.

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Meaning equivalence refers to the extent to which any act, whether verbal or non-verbal, has the same meaning when viewed by members of different cultures. The cultural linguist, Charles Osgood (1965) has made social scientists aware that words carry communicative value in excess of their exact denotative meaning. Thus, the word "cow" might have the same denotative or specific meaning for an American and a Hindu, i.e., a ruminant bovine quadruped. However, it will undoubtedly have very different connotative or emotional meanings to these two individuals because of cultural differences in attitudes and values.

All behavior is communicative in the sense that the observation of another person's behavior allows us to interpret that person's motivations, needs, traits, etc. We draw inferences about others from their behavior and those inferences are directly influenced by cultural differences. Successful interaction between persons with diverse cultural backgrounds depends on the extent to which misunderstandings due to problems in meaning equivalence can be reduced. Individuals must somehow be able to transcend culturally generated differences in social behavior in order to communicate more effectively.

The present study reported here was undertaken in an attempt to determine if the traits of flexibility, openness, and sensitivity found in high school teachers would be associated with higher levels of satisfaction among students in general and among minority students in particular (i.e., satisfaction with the teachers and the school environment). Three measures were administered to teachers: (1) the Parsons-Kreuter Ressentiment Index (Kreuter, 1971), a measure of teacher attitudes toward rules, regulations, and conformity, (2) the This I Believe test (Harvey, 1964, 1965, 1966; White and Harvey, 1965), a measure of concreteness-abstractness and authority orientation of value systems, and

(3) the Cross Cultural Sensitivity test, a measure of sensitivity to cultural differences in roles and values developed especially for this study. These measures were related to a measure of student satisfaction with the teacher and school environment obtained via the Friedenberg-Nordstrom Ressentiment Index (Friedenberg and Gold, 1965; Friedenberg, Nordstrom and Gold, 1969).

The general hypothesis was that teachers whose test scores indicated open, flexible, and sensitive styles would have more satisfied students especially among minority students.

Method

Subjects. Thirty-nine teachers and 953 students from two high schools located in Salt Lake City, Utah, participated in this study. Of the 953 students Ss, 127 were non-white including, Negro, Mexican-American, American-Indian, and Oriental-American students. The student Ss were the home-room students of the 39 teachers. Because of low concentrations of non-white populations in the target high schools, the 39 teachers selected as Ss were those with the highest concentration of non-white students in home-room classes.

Instruments

Students. Student attitudes toward their home-room teacher and class-room environment were used as the major dependent variable for the study. An attitude measure which was generated by Friedenberg and Gold (1965) and by Friedenberg, Nordstrom and Gold (1969), the Friedenberg-Nordstrom Ressentiment (F-NR) Index, became the basic student instrument. The set of questions was designed to test what Friedenberg, Nordstrom and Gold declared as the perceived "ressentiment" which students found in the school and among teachers. The term ressentiment referred

basically to an overriding atmosphere of covert hostility in the school and among teachers. A highly ressentient atmosphere for instance was described as one laden with demands of conformity, low interpersonal trust among teachers and with students, subtle but apparent acts of vengence and little acknowledgement of students as individuals. Another ingredient of a highly ressentient environment was denial. That is, the acts of vengence, etc., were couched in terms of the piety of the institution. The covert hostility, demands, and depersonalization were declared as being necessary if the institution was to accomplish its "teaching mission." Student responses to the questions were considered as comments on their relative satisfaction with the student-teacher interaction and the classroom environment.

Teachers. The Friedenberg, Nordstrom and Gold concept of ressentisent was extended recently by Kreuter (1971) into a test for teachers of individual ressentiment, the Parsons-Kreuter Ressentisent (P-KR) Index. Kreuter took the basic Friedenberg, et.al. approach for student attitudes toward their teachers and school and constructed a companion instrument which could compare attitudes of teachers with the ratings by their students. The intent of the Kreuter study was to identify those attitudes among teachers which seemed to be ressentient, i.e., to support an hostile, authority-laden atmosphere.

The This I Believe (TIB Test, cf. Harvey, 1964, 1965, 1966; White and Harvey, 1965) was included as a measure of value orientation among the teachers. Teachers differing in the concreteness-abstractness and openness of their value systems should differ in the goals, social milieu and behavior they seek from their students according to Harvey, White, Prother and Alter (1966). Styles of communication, values, and reactions to student adherence to or departure from certain standards should also differ as cognitive conceptuality differs among teachers.

A test of sensitivity and openness to cultural difference in norms and values was developed for the present study, and called the Cross-Cultural Sensitivity (CCS)scale. Items for the CCS were selected from a training program developed by Cheners (1969) for the Iranian culture. The training program, the Iranian Culture Assimilator (Cheners, 1969; Fiedler, Mitchell, and Triands, 1971) is a self-paced training program in which the trainee is presented with 75 problem episodes representing cases of misunderstanding between Americans and Iranians. Each problem episode is followed by four possible explanatory statements. The trainee, after reading the problem episode, chooses an explanation and is given feedback concerning the correctness of his choice. The problem episodes were based on "critical incident" reports of actual instances of intercultural misunderstanding and conflict. (Foa & Cheners, 1967).

The CCS scale was composed of 10 selected episodes presented with alternative explanations. The Ss were asked to choose the correct alternative. Feedback statements were not included in the CCS. The ability to choose the correct explanation for an episode was thought to represent a sensitivity and understanding for role expectations of a foreign culture.

Procedure. Utilizing the Multivariate Analysis of Variance program devised by Clyde, Cramer, and Sherin (1966) the data were evaluated. Time does not permit detailed discussion of results here. They are reported, however, in the most recent edition of the Journal of Afro-American Issues. A few comments are in order: The analysis yielded significant main effects for Teacher Ressentiment ($F=5.107, P<.001$) and for Cross-Cultural Sensitivity ($F=3.669, P<.001$), but not for Student Race.

High teacher ressentiment was associated with high scores on measures of student dissatisfaction. High Cross-cultural sensitivity was positively associated with student satisfaction. A significant interaction between Teacher Ressentiment and Cross-cultural Sensitivity was found. The interaction indicates that only the combination of low ressentiment and medium to high cultural sensitivity resulted in positive student ratings. Trend effects indicated that non-white students appeared to be especially sensitive to differences in teacher cross-cultural sensitivity. Trend effects also indicated that non-white students were somewhat more sensitive to differences between concrete and abstract teachers.

Discussion

The results of the present study provide relatively strong support for the hypothesis that the openness, flexibility and sensitivity of a teacher's cognitive and perceptual systems can have profound effects on the satisfaction and adjustment of students. These findings apply to both white and non-white students, the differences between these groups being of degree rather than kind.

These data resulted in an extremely interesting, and somewhat unexpected finding of this study. When measured by a ressentiment index, teachers' non-authoritarianism, warmth and openness alone did not result in greater student satisfaction. It was when the warmth and openness

were combined with an ability to understand and relate to others (i.e. intercultural sensitivity) that satisfaction increased. The dimensions of openness, and sensitivity appeared to be especially crucial in the case of non-white students.

For explanatory convenience, the interaction of low teacher ressentiment and low cross-cultural sensitivity might be called the "missionary syndrome". The stereotypic portrayal of the missionary is that of one who brings great warmth, concern and individual attention to his charges, but without the ability to understand and accept cultural role expectations as different, relativistic, and acceptable. Without the sensitivity to understand another and resist the inclination to make strong and negative attributions based on unusual behavior, the concerned individual may be seen as paternalistic and unresponsive.

A cognitive style characterized by an ethnocentric and restricted definition of appropriate behavior compounds the problems of meaning equivalence described earlier. Attribution theory provides an excellent framework for understanding the problem of meaning equivalence in cross-cultural communication. The theory of correspondent inferences developed by Jones and Davis (1965) explains the manner in which a perceiver draws inferences about the internal states of another person. Attribution is the process of inferring personal characteristics, dispositions, or motivations of another person from that other person's behavior. The perceiver of a behavioral act (and all communication involves behavioral acts) asks himself, "what did the actor mean by that act and how sure can I be that that act represents some basic characteristic of the actor?"

The perceiver seeks to answer those questions by considering the act in relation to the normative expectations for the situation. If the actor behaves in the way most people "should" or "would" behave in that situation, very little can be inferred about the internal state which prompted the act. The actor, after all, behaved in conformity with the situational norms.

If, however, the actor behaves in an unusual or unexpected way, his behavior is no longer seen to be under normative control. In such a case, it is assumed that the individual is acting only in accordance with his own personal characteristics or motivations. Thus, very strong inferences are drawn and attributions are made.

If the consequences of an act are perceived to be predominantly positive, the perceiver will be more favorably disposed toward the actor. The converse will be true of actions where effects seem negative (Jones and Davis, 1965). Likewise, cues about shared perspectives should facilitate or detract from the formation of definite hypotheses about the actor's motives and desires. Other cues, perhaps reflected in features of the actor's appearance might lead the perceiver to assume similarity or difference of intention and disposition before any act has occurred.

The relevance of this theory to the question of cross-cultural communication lies in the fact that correct inferences and attributions can be made only when both parties to an interaction share a common set of expectations. However, cultures, by definition, entail patterns of role expectations which are often unique. Thus an act which the actor perceives to be well within the bounds of normative role behavior may be seen by a perceiver with a different cultural background as deviant,

unusual, and negative behavior. For example, an adult male Arab who grasps and holds the hand of a male companion is behaving in a normative fashion. The same act by an American male would lead to a very different set of inferences and attributions. Accurate attribution requires the ability to recognize and positively react to cultural differences.

In the present study, teachers who were scored as having relatively concrete and authoritarian values and low levels of inter-cultural sensitivity, are also likely to define as proper behavior only their own culture's normative role expectations. These teachers are likely to perceive any other behavior as deviant, with attendant strong and negative attributions. If members of minority subcultures do indeed have cultural role expectations different from the white middle class majority, then the behavior of minority group members is likely to lead to misattribution and conflict for many teachers. This conflict can only interfere with a successful educational process.

Interestingly, the present research indicates that unusual or exceptional patterns of relating to others are not required for successful communication with minority students. The same variables which affect teacher-student communication in general apply, but with intensification of effects to interactions involving minority students.

The present line of research may provide the concerned school administrator with a means for the selection and assignment of teachers where minority student education is charged. A future line of inquiry must consider how the actual interactive behavior of teachers with low ressentiment and high cross-cultural sensitivity scores differs from those with other characteristics.

FOOTNOTE

(.) Certain questions of a technical nature have been raised concerning the use of the Clyde, Cramer and Sherin MANOVA program, a least squares analysis, with data such as these when cell sizes are unequal. Certain critics (cf. Overall, J.E. and Spiegel, D.K., concerning Least Squares Analysis of Experimental Data, Psychological Bulletin 1969, Vol. 72 #5, 311-322) charge that only the last factor entering the design may be calculated without confounding results. To test this eventuality, the analyses described here were re-run alterday the order in which the design factors were entered. No essential differences were demonstrated. No differences in the data reported below were found among any of the alternate sequences.

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